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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine the effects of consultation on consultee perceptions of the causality of children's school- related problems and the expectations for successful problem resolution. Participants were 39 volunteer teachers from Catholic elementary schools, none of whom had ever before worked with a consultant. Consultants were 7 certified school psychologists, all of whom had completed formal training in collaborative-behavioral consultation. Consultation sessions took place in school settings. Differential changes in perceptions were examined for teachers who worked with the consultant for 10 weeks and teachers in a no-treatment control group. Transcriptions of audiotaped neutral interviews conducted with teachers prior to and following weekly consultation sessions over the 10 weeks were analyzed using an attributional framework consisting of the dimensions of locus of causality and globality. Trained raters classified the attributional content of the transcriptions, and expert raters also independently assigned each transcription an overall rating according to how optimistic they perceived the teacher to be regarding problem resolution. Analysis of attributional statements indicated no significant changes in teachers' perceptions of causality or expectations for successful problem resolution between groups or within groups from pre- to post-treatment. (NB)

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CHANGES IN TEACHER ATTRIBUTIONS OF STUDENT PROBLEMS FOLLOWING CONSULTATION

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of School Psychologists, 21st, Boston, MA, March 28-April 2, 1989

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of consultation on consultee perceptions of the causality of children's school-related problems and the expectations for successful problem resolution. Change differences were studied for teachers working with collaborative school psychological consultants, and those in a no-treatment control group. Transcriptions of audiotaped neutral interviews conducted with teachers prior to and following weekly consultation sessions over a ten week period were analyzed using an attributional framework consisting of the dimensions: locus of causality and globality. Trained raters classified the attributional content of the transcriptions, and expert raters also independently assigned each transcription an overall rating according to how optimistic they perceived the teacher to be regarding problem resolution. Data were statistically analyzed to compare the performance of control and experimental group subjects, and to examine the changes in experimental group subjects between pretreatment and posttreatment.

Changes in Teacher Attributions of Student Problems Following Consultation

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While evaluative reviews of the expanding body of research on school-based consultation continue to note the overall efficacy of the consultation process (Mannino & Shore, 1975; Medway, 1979b; Updyke, Melton, & Medway, 1981), weaknesses in design and methodology somewhat limit the information to be gained and the conclusions that can be drawn (Gresham & Kendall, 1987; Medway, 1979b; Pryzwansky, 1986). In addition, there exists a need for further studies to examine process variables that may be associated with successful outcomes of consultation (Alpert & Yammer, 1983). Few studies have specifically investigated teachers' attributions and expectations although the potential impact on the consultation process has been recognized.

Many research studies focusing on attributions indicate that teachers very often perceive within-the-child or home factors to be the primary reason for students' problems and view classroom or instructional factors to be of little

influence (Burger, Cooper, & Good, 1982; Medway, 1979a). There is also evidence in these studies that the teachers' attributions affect their expectations for change, the goals set, and the strategies selected to meet the goals for problem resolution (Brophy & Rohrkemper, 1981; Cooper, Burger, & Seymour, 1979). On the other hand, it has been noted that external attributions may more often lead to the development of effective academic and behavioral interventions (Mischel, 1979).

Previous research demonstrated that teachers exposed to direct interaction and modeling through consultation significantly improved in their problem-clarification skills and moved from an inferential to a factually descriptive base (Curtis & Watson, 1980). In addition, teachers' attributions for the causation of students' school-related problems changed from internal-to-the-child to interactional in nature (Wehmann, Zins, & Curtis, 1989). Ponti and Curtis (1985) reported a similar trend in the generalization of attributional change, although results were not significant.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of consultation on consultee's perceptions of the causality of children's school-related problems and the expectations of successful problem resolution. The intent of the investigation was to determine differential changes in perceptions between those teachers who had worked with a consultant for 10 weeks and those teachers in a control

group. The investigation was focused on the generalization of change.

This study has several methodological advantages when compared with previous research endeavors focusing on the consultation process. The consultants were certified school psychologists, all of whom had completed formal training in collaborative-behavioral consultation, which had been demonstrated to be effective (Curtis & Zins, 1988). Based on analysis of their actual functioning, it was determined that all consultants were effective in this role (Murphy, 1988). Furthermore, the consultation sessions occurred in school settings with certified classroom teachers who presented actual student-related problems.

Method

Participants were 39 volunteer classroom teachers from suburban Catholic elementary schools. None reported having previously worked with a consultant. The 7 consultants in the study were assigned randomly to schools.

Each of the experimental and control teachers initially participated in a neutral interview prior to the initiation of consultation services. Those assigned to the consultation treatment group then participated in a series of 10 weekly consultation sessions. The control group received no consultation services. Following the 10-week consultation period, neutral interviews were again conducted with all experimental and control group subjects.

Transcriptions of audiotaped neutral interviews were analyzed using an attributional categorization system. A pair of trained raters identified attributional units within the transcriptions, and an additional pair of trained raters classified the attributional content of the transcriptions along two dimensions: a) locus of causality, and b) globality. Expert raters also independently assigned each transcription an overall rating according to how optimistic they perceived the teacher to be regarding problem resolution.

Results and Discussion

Analyses of attributional statements indicated no significant changes in teachers' perceptions of causality or expectations for successful problem resolution between groups or within groups from pre- to posttreatment. The findings indicate that teachers may have been more influenced by their role expectations of the consultant than their actual consultation experience. In addition, results suggest the importance of organizational factors and the entry process in communicating the consultant's role to potential consumers. Another interpretation of these findings is that 10 weeks was not a sufficient amount of time for teachers to successfully work through an adequate number of problem situations for problem-solving skills to generalize.

Future research efforts might involve two groups of school psychological consultants who have been given identical training but different titles to examine the impact of role expectations on the conusultation process. Additional studies might employ a longer consultation treatment period and a self-report measure to more clearly determine teacher's expectations of problem resolution.

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